

TOWN OF LANESBOROUGH
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
FINANCE COMMITTEE
LANESBOROUGH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COMMITTEE
TRI-COMMITTEE MEETING
Submitted by Diane Stevens, Town Secretary
October 22, 2014

Present: John Goerlach, Selectmen Chair; Robert Ericson, Selectmen; Henry Sayers, Selectmen; Al Terranova, Finance Committee Chair; Gregory Wolf, Finance Committee; Christine Galib, Finance Committee; Ronald Tinkham, Finance Committee; Stephen Wentworth, Finance Committee; Regina DiLegio, LES Committee Chair; Robert Barton, LES Committee; James Moriarty, LES Committee and Paul Sieloff, Town Administrator

The meeting was opened by Paul Sieloff at 6:05 p.m.

Town Administrator Paul Sieloff stated that the premise for the meeting was to get the Boards together to talk about the budget for the Town as it relates to the Elementary School. Mr. Sieloff spoke about the shrinking population of the School and wanted the Boards to work together towards setting the budget for the School. Mr. Sieloff stated that the budget for the School is increasing but the percentage of tax increase is not enough and this ends up taking money away from other Town projects.

Henry Sayers stated that the Selectmen wanted this meeting to try to get a better understanding of how the Elementary School comes to their budget.

Mr. Sieloff asked the School Committee how their budget looks for this year and next. Robert Barton stated that after the Town meeting the School Committee realized that they had inadvertently omitted two staff members which greatly affected the budget. Mr. Barton stated that the School did receive some grant money which helped with this deficit but that they have a tight budget. Mr. Barton stated that the teachers take further education courses and they can never anticipate when these courses will be taken and what the exact amount of money would be needed to pay for the teachers' additional compensation and they also cannot be sure of the heating budget.

Al Terranova stated that in the last 5-8 years the education budget has substantially increased and that the State is not giving the School any additional aid and the Town needs to plan for this. Mr. Terranova stated that the Finance Committee only makes recommendations and they will likely be recommending less money be given to the School at Town meeting.

Mr. Sieloff stated that he does not want to have the School budget cut at Town meeting but we should try to work together and present a unified front. Mr. Sieloff asked the School Committee about the possibility of limiting or eliminating tuition and/or school choice students as a way of keeping the School to 1 class per grade. Mr. Barton stated that he thought the enrollment would be pretty stable for the next 4-5 years but will drop substantially after that. Mr. Barton also stated that the School Committee has not talked enough about this to give the Selectmen or the Finance Committee an answer regarding future enrollment and that the School Committee did not want to look into immediate elimination of tuition or choice students.

Mr. Sieloff asked about the possibility raising the amount of money that New Ashford pays for tuition. Ms. Dilego stated that the tuition money goes to the Town not the School.

Mr. Sieloff stated that if the School took on choice or tuition students and it increased the enrollment numbers so that an additional teacher would be necessary, it would raise the budget. Mr. Goerlach asked if tuition fees have been increased to what it actually costs the Town. Mr. Sieloff stated that it is something the Town should look into for 2016 when the tuition agreement ends and that Williamstown Elementary may be willing to take these tuition students.

Ms. Dilego stated that there are formulas as to cost per student which factor in health insurance and transportation but she believed that health insurance was not factored in with the tuition students. Mr. Goerlach stated that health insurance should be factored in.

Mr. Sieloff noted that the Finance Committee stated that the actual cost is over \$20,000 per pupil. Mr. Barton said the School Committee has labored over tuition vs. choice for students. Mr. Barton stated that he would like the Board of Selectmen to come to their meetings to see their struggle over these issues.

Ms. Dilego stated that \$100,000 of the budget is being supported by choice students. Mr. Goerlach asked how many students were choice and how many teachers would have to be eliminated if the Town chose not to accept them. Ms. Dilego stated that 21 children were choice and 9 were tuition. Mr. Barton would like the Board of Selectmen to provide input as to the tuition amount for New Ashford students. Mr. Ericson talked about Mount Greylock Regional High School and the amount of money it costs for Town for school choice students which increases classes due to more students showing that the same problem exists there and it begins at the elementary level.

Mr. Sieloff stated that the Board of Selectmen were disappointed because the Town wants to be able to pave 3 to 4 roads per year and was only able to pave minimal roads this year due to the lack of money for infrastructure work and this could pose problems in the future.

Mr. Ericson stated that once a student is choiced-in they remain in our school system and he would like the three Boards to look into the long term effects of this.

Mr. Terranova stated that it seems like other districts embrace choice and we do not and he would like to understand why. Ms. Dilego said it is a preference as to whether or not the Town wants to grow its school in size regardless of the cost or make it a 1 class per grade school. Mr. Barton's enrollment forecast for the next 10 years is 160 students. The enrollment now it is about 200 and the school was built for approximately 350 students. Mr. Barton says classes may reduce to 8 to 10 students per class without choice or tuition students. Regina stated that only 2 grades currently have 1 class.

Jim Moriarty stated that without choice students that revenue stream stops and asked if the Town wanted to give up this revenue. Mr. Sieloff asked what the difference between tuition and choice students was and what was the amount of money the Town receives for each student especially if the student has special needs. Kim Grady stated that if a student has special needs that the School submits costs to the State

and the State sends money to School. Ms. Dilego said that the State does not keep up with what it actually costs per student as the rate was established in 1992 and has not been adjusted since. Mr. Barton also pointed out that the Town pays for children who choice out of the Town's schools.

Mr. Moriarty stated that choice students, as long as they do not require an additional teacher, is a cost benefit to the town. Mr. Sayers stated that it is unless the following year requires an additional teacher. Greg Wolf asked if there was any flexibility as to the number of students per class that would require an additional teacher. Ms. Dilego stated that the law states that there can only be 25 students per class in Kindergarten and 35 students in all other grades. She stated that currently there are 23 students in Pre-K, 15 in Kindergarten, 30 in 1st grade, 28 in 2nd, 32 in 3rd, 19 in 4th, 34 in 5th and 31 in 6th. Mr. Moriarty stated that the quality of education lessens with larger class sizes. Mr. Goerlach stated that if we have excellent teachers the quality of education would not be lessened.

Mr. Goerlach stated the Town cannot sustain the budget that the School has. Mr. Barton said that maybe we could look into a different Superintendent option which could save money. Mr. Barton also stated that the Town could save on transportation by eliminating a bus for students that live within ½ mile of the School saving \$30,000. Ms. DiLego stated that it is a safety issue to have elementary students walking. Mr. Moriarty stated that the school just found savings and now the Board is saying no and if the Board wants something they are going to have to give something up. Mr. Moriarty wants to know what the Town and voters are willing to do.

Christine Galib wanted to know if it was a resident's responsibility to keep the sidewalk in front of their house cleared and why a police officer couldn't be monitoring the children walking after school. Mr. Goerlach stated that we would have to check into it. Mr. Goerlach stated that the Town has applied for a grant to put a crosswalk signal at the intersection of Summer Street and it hasn't been granted but we will continue to apply.

Mr. Terranova stated that the Finance Committee is not going to micromanage the School Committee but that changes need to be made to save money.

Ron Tinkham stated that building is designed for 350 and in a year of so there will only be 160 students leaving the School with excess classrooms. Mr. Tinkham proposed making the School K through 8. Ms. Dilego stated that the Regional agreement says 7 to 12 and this cannot be done. Mr. Moriarty stated that it could be something to look into. Mr. Moriarty stated that it was good for Town to see this meeting so they can see and decide what needs to be done. Mr. Wolf wanted to make it known that their job is not only to provide for the School but for elderly and others in Town as well.

Mr. Terranova would like this to be a joint decision by the time it goes to the Town meeting. Ms. Dilego stated that she appreciated the Finance Committee's willingness to work with the School Committee.

Meeting adjourned at 7:17